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Meeting the Needs of Crime Victims

(Phoenix, Ariz. – April 20, 2007) As we recognize National Crime Victims' Rights Week, April 22-28, the recent tragedy at Virginia Tech magnifies the importance of providing much needed strength and support to victims and their families to help overcome the often devastating effects of crimes.

Paying attention to the needs of crime victims is a recent development in our justice system. For centuries, people have studied criminology to understand why people become criminals, to identify trends and to advance prevention. Only recently have we begun to investigate crime victims, from the demographics, to victim needs and perspectives. Victimology is the study of the physical, emotional and financial trauma that people suffer as a result of criminal activity.

Historically, victims were not represented in the justice system – defendants had rights, victims did not. Rising crime rates in the 1960s and 1970s, plus the work of grass-root organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving, increased concern for victims. The Office for Victims of Crime in the U.S. Department of Justice was created. Federal victims' rights legislation was passed. Thirty-two states, including Arizona, now have constitutional victims' rights amendments. Our State's law was adopted by voters in 1990.

Arizona is a recognized leader in supporting victims' rights. Local groups, like the Pima County Victim Witness Program, are recognized nationally for their work on behalf of victims in crisis. Thousands of people across our State work to meet the needs of victims, to understand why they are victimized, and to promote justice and healing for every victim, in every case. They do so much to help transform victims into triumphant survivors.

I salute all of the professionals and volunteers. During this week of recognition, we give special thanks for their empathy and commitment to crime victims. They make a difference in the lives of all Arizonans.